What's up with our nation's waters?

A status report on the quality of our waters and what you can do to make a difference

We all need clean water. After all, our bodies are at least 65 percent water. Fish and wildlife depend on clean water to survive. We need clean water to grow crops and to operate factories, and we need clean water for drinking, swimming, surfing, fishing and sailing.

What's inside?

Inside this report you'll find out the following:

- **What scientists measure in our water**
- **What percentage of our waters are clean**
- **Major pollutants in our waters**
- **Suggestions of what you can do to help**
- **Projects you can do for school or fun**
- **A quiz to test your water smarts**
- **A glossary that defines some common terms**

Test your water smarts!

1. True or false: Watersheds are located mainly in mountainous regions with high rainfall.

2. Circle the correct answer: Most of the pollutants entering our waters come from the following sources:
   A. Wastewater treatment plants
   B. Runoff from fields and streets
   C. Factories along rivers

3. True or false: Students can join organizations to help monitor their waters.

Now read the rest of this booklet and then take the rest of the quiz at the back to test your water smarts!

What is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, is responsible for protecting human health and the natural environment from pollution. EPA does this by conducting research, enforcing laws, developing national policies, and providing information and technical help to states and communities.

How often does EPA report on the nation's waters?

EPA and the states* are directed by the Clean Water Act (CWA) to help protect the health of our nation's waters. The CWA gives states the authority and responsibility to establish water quality standards, which set minimum requirements for fish habitat, swimming, and drinking water sources. States, under Section 305(b) of CWA, are required to assess the health of their waters and submit the information to EPA every two years. EPA gathers the information from every state and prepares a report called the *National Water Quality Inventory*. To see the latest 305(b) report or other information on the quality of our nation's waters, visit www.epa.gov/305b on the Internet.

When EPA says "state," it means states, territories, Indian tribes, and other jurisdictions.

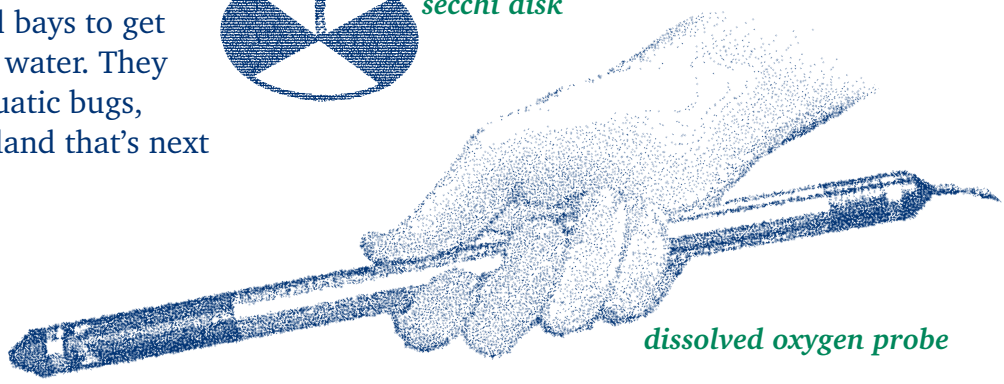
How do we measure the quality of our waters?

Doctors use instruments like thermometers and stethoscopes to check on your health. Scientists use instruments like Secchi (sek'-ee) disks, probes, nets, gauges, and meters to determine how healthy the water is. They take measurements of the physical and chemical condition of the water and the health of the critters that live in it.

Scientists collect water in lots of different ways. They use boats to go out in the middle of lakes, they wade into streams wearing rubber boots that go up to their chests, they drop buckets over the sides of bridges—they'll do almost anything to get a sample.

Water samples aren't the only things scientists collect. They take photographs from airplanes and even satellites. They use their eyes to observe what's happening along streams, lakes, and bays to get an overall sense of the health of the water. They also collect fish, plants, dirt, and aquatic bugs, and study what's happening on the land that's next to the water.

secchi disk



dissolved oxygen probe